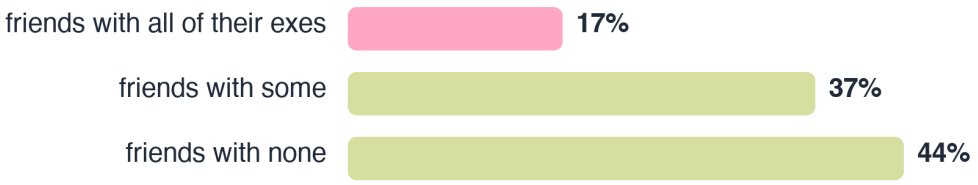
Can you stay friends with an ex?

YouGov asked American adults who have an ex whether they are still friends. The biggest group said: with none of them.



YouGov, 15-19 September 2022, 1,000 US adults with at least one ex.

But more than half are still friends with at least one ex. Is it a good idea? A 2003 song gives one very clear answer.

Meet the song

White Flag · Dido, 2003

From the album *Life for Rent*. The relationship is over, but the singer still loves him and refuses to give up: there will be no white flag.

She connects what is true now with what happened before. Joining two times is the job of a mixed conditional.



Photo: Dido by Raph_PH, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons, cropped.

Listen and read

Play the song in **Spotify**, **Apple Music** or **YouTube Music** with the lyrics switched on.

Where to look	What to find
Verse 1	One line: *if* + past simple (now), then *would have* + past participle (before). The mixed line.
Verse 2	Two *if* lines about what he does now.
The bridge	*When we meet* + *will*: a first conditional about the future.
The chorus	*will* and *won't* with no *if*: a promise.

Two times, one sentence

The if part	The result	Example
past cause *had + past participle*	**present** result *would + verb*	*If I'd saved money, I'd be on holiday now.*
present situation *past simple*	**past** result *would have + past participle*	*If I were braver, I'd have said something.*

Ask two questions: when is the if part, and when is the result?

Good to know

1. **Mixed is the natural next step** after the second and third conditional: you take one half from each.
2. **Time words help:** *now, today, still* point to a present result.
3. **could and might** work in the result too: *If I'd learned to drive, I could drive to work.*
4. **Present situations are often permanent:** *If I weren't afraid of heights, I'd have tried skydiving.*

Song titles and artist names are used for identification only. esl.laboratory is not affiliated with or endorsed by the artists or their labels.

Teacher's notes: three ways to use this page

In class (40 minutes)

Discuss the chart: *Are you friends with an ex? Should you be?* Play the song twice, the second time with lyrics on, for Exercise 1. Teach the time map, then Exercises 2 to 6. Exercise 7 as a speaking round.

As homework

Students listen with lyrics on at home and do Exercises 1 to 6. In the next lesson, check the answers and compare their Exercise 7 decisions.

One-to-one online

Share your screen with the lyrics. Let the student find the mixed line in verse 1 and explain the two times aloud before any writing.

Watch for

1. *If he had studied medicine, he would have been a doctor now*: a present result needs *would be*.
2. The bridge line is first conditional. If students pick it in Exercise 1, use it to contrast real future with mixed past-present.

Practice

Exercise 1
Read the lyrics as you listen. Circle the right answer.

1. In the verse 1 line, the *if* part is about **now** / **the past**.
2. Its result is about **now** / **the past**.
3. The bridge starts with **If** / **When** and is about **the future** / **the past**.
4. In the chorus, she uses **would** / **will**.

Exercise 2
Then and now. Match each past event to its result today.

1. I didn't learn to drive. **d**
2. She moved to Lisbon. **a**
3. We missed the last train. **e**
4. I stayed up all night. **b**
5. He didn't study medicine. **c**

A. She speaks Portuguese.
B. I'm exhausted.
C. He isn't a doctor.
D. I can't drive to work.
E. We're stuck at the station.

Exercise 3
Third or mixed? Write T or M.

1. If I had left earlier, I wouldn't have missed the train. **T**
2. If I had left earlier, I wouldn't be so stressed now. **M**
3. If she spoke French, she would have got the job. **M**
4. If we had known, we would have called you. **T**
5. If he weren't so shy, he would have asked her out. **M**

Exercise 4
Complete the mixed conditionals with the verbs in brackets.

1. If she **hadn't moved** (not move) to Lisbon, she **wouldn't speak** (not speak) Portuguese.
2. If we **hadn't missed** (not miss) the train, we **wouldn't be** (not be) stuck here.
3. If he **had studied** (study) medicine, he **would be** (be) a doctor now.
4. If I **were** (be) more organised, I **wouldn't have forgotten** (not forget) your birthday.

Exercise 5
Present situation, past result. Write one sentence.

1. I'm not brave, so I didn't say anything.
   If I were brave, I would have said something.
2. She doesn't like crowds, so she didn't go to the concert.
   If she liked crowds, she would have gone to the concert.
3. He isn't very patient, so he didn't wait for us.
   If he were more patient, he would have waited for us.

Exercise 6
Each sentence has one mistake. Write it correctly.

1. If I had studied medicine, I would have been a doctor now.
   If I had studied medicine, I would be a doctor now.
2. If I would be braver, I would have spoken.
   If I were braver, I would have spoken.
3. If she hadn't moved, she wouldn't spoke Portuguese.
   If she hadn't moved, she wouldn't speak Portuguese.
4. If he hadn't lost his job, he would had more money now.
   If he hadn't lost his job, he would have more money now.

Exercise 7
One decision. Think of a choice you made. How would your life be different now? (50 to 70 words)

DECISIONS YOU COULD WRITE ABOUT	
where you studied	learning, or not learning, a language
a job you took or turned down	a hobby you started or gave up
moving to a new city or country	a friend you met by chance

SENTENCE STARTERS	
A few years ago I decided to ...	If I had ..., I'd be ... now.
If I hadn't ..., I wouldn't ... now.	If I were more ..., I'd have ...

Example: *Ten years ago I chose to study English instead of law. If I had studied law, I would be a lawyer now and I would probably earn more. But I wouldn't teach, and I wouldn't have met my students. If I were braver, I might have tried both. I don't regret it.*